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BY

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" A STUDY OF FORT VALLEY STATE COLLEGE AND FUTURE BLACK AGRICULTURAL  
TECHICANS IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA 1950 - 1975"

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## INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis of this paper is that Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture provides Black students with a perspective that relates agriculture to the needs of Black people. A multitude of factors influence my decision to look at the field of agriculture and its relationship to Black people. Three major factors were the world food crisis, the rate of loss of Black owned lands in recent years, and the general survival of Black people within the boundaries of the United States.

The loss of land has been extremely high among Black farmers, especially between the periods of 1950 to 1969. Since 1969 no one has computed how much more land has been lost by Black people. "In 1950 there were 560,000 Black operated farms, today [1969] there are only 98,000; says a National Sharecroppers Fund Report from 1970." <sup>1</sup>

The loss of land has occurred for various reasons, some of which will be discussed broadly in chapter I. An ancillary relationship is drawn between the direct loss of farm land and the food crisis affecting the Black community. For segments of the Black community there has always been a food crisis. Since people throughout the United States and the world are talking about how hard it is going to be to feed people, times will get even harder for poor Black people. A contributing factor to food being more difficult to obtain by poor Black people is that the more publicity that is given to the food shortage, the higher the prices become.<sup>2</sup>

Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz was quoted as saying that there is no food crisis. He believes that U. S. farmers can supply the world with food as long as they are given the proper incentive - more money.<sup>3</sup> One must also remember that this is the same Butz that has taken a strong position against food stamps. It would appear that the only people that will have a food crisis are the same people, who have always had a food crisis, caused by their inability to pay the market price of food. At one point in time, it might not have been so difficult for people to feed themselves, that is when they were on the farm and could raise most of their own food. At this point we may have made a full circle without land one cannot raise one's own crops. It is not necessary to present details on Black survival, Black survival has always been in jeopardy in the U. S., this can be substantiated by reading We Cry Genocide. If there is a future for Black people, that future will depend on Black people uniting and planning for the future. It is because of concern for the future of Black people that this paper focuses on Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture.

Fort Valley State College is the only Black land grant college within the State of Georgia; this means Fort Valley State College is the only Black college in the state to receive public monies in order to educate in the field of agriculture. Since its inception the majority of the student body has been black. Since Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture is the only state school so designated, I contend that that particular educational resource has an obligation to provide technical assistance to Georgia's Black farmers and to



other members of Georgia's Black community. Further Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture has an obligation to produce Black students that are aware of the peculiar problems of Black farmers and the Black students must be equipped to provide feasible solutions to problems. As stated in the hypothesis, there will be some inquiry into the accountability gap between Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture and the established needs of Black people.

In order to prove the thesis several methods were devised to gather data. There were numerous interviews with some persons familiar with the school, these interviews supplied background information. Faculty members were also interviewed. A major weakness in the interviews was the technique, conversations tended to be free-floating. A more specific set of questions would have resulted in more information.

The second source of primary data gathering was a questionnaire designed for members of the junior and senior class in the Division of Agriculture. These questions were administered solely by instructors in the various classes. Since I was not a part of that process I cannot vouch for how it was introduced to the students, such would have a defined affect on how they answered the questions.

All of the questionnaires were not returned. I received the entire senior class, but only three from the junior class and three miscellaneous questionnaires. Since I did not get all of the junior class, nor representative number, I made the decision to only use

those questionnaires compiled by the senior class.

There is one factor that should be mentioned in relationship to the information about Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture. At the present time the school has a lawsuit against it. Some white Fort Valley citizens are suing the school, because they feel that the only purpose the school serves, is that of a diploma mill, due to the suit some members of the faculty appeared to be hesitant in giving information, since they really did not know why the information was being sought, some seemed a little less hesitant after it was explained in detail that the information was being used for a paper required by Atlanta University School of Social Work in order for me to meet graduation requirements.

The information in the paper on the loss of Black owned lands, Black farmers and general information come from books and magazines. I am extremely grateful to Black Enterprise, Ebony Magazine and The Black Economic Research Center, all three of which just put out fairly recent information on Black farmers and the loss of Black owned land.

## CHAPTER I

### SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

"The relationship of Black people to land has considerable considerable significance both for the social health of the general society and also for the Black community's own welfare!"<sup>4</sup> With the loss of land by Black people, the Black community is increasingly becoming a community without a land base. If one were to add up all the land that Black people have had in the United States, since Black have been able to own land, the land would make up three countries the size of Isreal.<sup>5</sup> Without land Black people will definitely lack an economic base. Black people in America have always been tied to the land, not always out of desire. However, with the great migration, Black people have generally left the land and made their way to the urban areas:

Although the greater portion of Blacks who have left rural America were probably not land owners, the migration and the causes behind the migration are believed to have contributed heavily to a decline in Black land ownership. The number of acres of farm land owned in full or in part by Blacks declined from 12 million to 5.5 million acres between 1950-1969. a loss of more than 50%. This decline, which seems to be continuing unabated, is taking place at the very moment when the southern Black community is finally within grasping distance of some degree of political control over its destiny as the effect of voting rights act of 1965 begins to translate into majority rule in the heavily Black counties in the South.<sup>6</sup>

There were several reasons set forth as the causes in the decline of Black owned land. One of the reasons for the decline was mentioned

in the quote above, out-migration. Although the majority of the people going to urban areas do not own land, in the case where they do, the land is often left idle and unprotected.

It appears that land heirs have been generally disinterested in claiming southern lands, ironically, the very last to consider the importance of land has been the generation of young Blacks who have migrated from the rural South to the urban North and West in massive numbers."<sup>7</sup> In many cases the young Blacks are just beginning to realize that land represents an economic base.

Another means (of Bla.) by which Blacks loose land is through legal trickery. In its report on the decline of Black owned land in the south, the Black Economic Research Center mentions four methods used to separate Black people from their land: tax sales, mortgage foreclosures, partition sales and failure to write wills.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, there is no information yet available as to how much Black own land in Georgia has been lost by the four methods. The tax sale takes place when the state, municipal or county governments confiscate tax delinquent property and auction it off. This occurs because many of the Black land owners are not aware that they owe taxes or that their property is being sold to liquidate the tax debt. The Emergency Land Fund, which is located in Atlanta, states that the tax-sale-situation develops because, in many cases, the Black owner happens to be either "elderly

and forgetful, because he never received a tax bill or a notice of the delinquency sale, because he thought he had paid the taxes when in fact he was paying some other type of payment or because the owner has moved away."<sup>9</sup>

Mortgage foreclosures result when the Black land owner gets a second mortgage in order to pay off a debt usually the debt itself does not merit the entire farm being relinquished, but in most cases the Black farmer is not aware that he can fight for his land.<sup>10</sup>

Blacks losing land through legal chicanery is due in large measure to the fact that many older rural Blacks die without leaving wills. The aversion to writing a will is based on an old superstition that if you write a will, it is at that point that you will die.<sup>11</sup> As a result of there being no written document as to the legal owner and heir, an overwhelming amount of problems can occur. In many cases, whites end up with the land for nominal amounts of ready cash.

An extension of the above-no will is the partition sales, which is also known as "heirs property sales." The partition sales is explained excellently in Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black Owned Land in the Rural South:

When a Black landowner dies without a will, which is the normal case, the land remains in his name. Since the estate is never distributed, all the heirs have an undetermined interest in the land. Often two or more generations pass in this way, there are no wills, the land remains in the name of the deceased ancestor, and heirs, all of whom have an interest in the land scatter.

This clouds the title, and no mortgage can be gotten, no part sold or otherwise disposed of without the consent of all the owners. In many cases, the persons living on the land and/or paying the taxes do not know the identities of all of the heirs who have a legal interest in the property. Of those of whom they are aware, the whereabouts of many are often unknown. Heirs cannot get a part cut off for themselves without a suit to quiet title which involves determining time consuming and often results in the entire property being lost to the family in the following way: suit for partition is brought to divide the land among the heirs and give each title to his owned piece. The number of heirs and the size of the property is generally such that it is physically impractical or impossible to actually divide the land. Therefore, the land is sold and the proceeds are divided among the heirs, in the proportion of their interest in the land. At such a partition sale, the only person with enough assets to buy the land is a white man and because there is usually no other bidder he gets the land for a fraction of its market value. A variation of this procedure, where the white man instigates the partition offer having gained a small interest, has been used, especially in the past, to gain Black-owned land. This is sometimes known as legal theft. The widespread holding of land as heirs properly depresses the value of Black land because all those titles are clouded...<sup>12</sup>

The last category considered here regarding the ways in which Black people lose their farm land is due to poor management of the farm land. Without the ability to manage a farm properly the owner will most likely wind up "broke" and more possibly, a large corporate farmer will be waiting to negotiate final sale of the Black owner's property.

It is especially in this area where the agricultural majors from such schools as Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture can be of assistance. Within the Division of Agriculture the students are given the skills, which make them experts in the area of managing a farm and doing agricultural research, least wise from the source matter

the students are subjected to they should be experts. The problem appears to be that either Black students are not interested in going into the field of agriculture or those that are majoring in the field are interested in putting as much space between them and the farm back home as possible.

In talking to non-agricultural majors at Fort Valley it was continuously stated that those students majoring in agriculture were farmers and the other students had difficulty understanding why anyone would want to be a farmer. On Fort Valley's campus, there is a fraternity which is designated as the farmer's fraternity." The non-agricultural majors could not see the significance of Black people in the field of agriculture, for that matter, the agricultural majors, in many cases, were not clear on the importance of Black people going into agriculture.

## CHAPTER II

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

All statistical information cited in this chapter is from The Distribution of Southern Black Population.<sup>13</sup>

In the period 1950-1975 the number of Black out-migrants was 204,337, in the state of Georgia, at the rate of 19.2 per cent. In the period of 1960-1970 the number was 137,919 with a rate of 12.5% which means that between 1960-1970 Georgia lost less of her population than in the previous decade. One of the reasons for the relative increase in the retention of Georgia's Black population is that many Black people are moving into urban areas within the state, such as Atlanta.

Between 1960-1970 there has been a 6.6% change in population in Georgia, 19.2% refers back to the net change in the rate of migration from the rural area. Another factor influencing this rate change has been due to natural increase of the State, which would account for 25.8%.

According to the 1970 census Georgia ranks third in general population figures among the eleven southern states, with a population of 4,590,00. The Black population in Georgia ranks second among the eleven southern states, with a total Black population of 1,187,000. During the period 1960-1970 there has been a 5.8% change in the Black



population and a 20.4% change in the white population, 25.9% of Georgia's population is Black.

In Peach County where Fort Valley State College is located, there has been a 11.0% gain in the Black population between 1960-1970. It is interesting to note that within the eighteen counties in which Fort Valley State College, maintain extension services, fourteen of those counties have shown a loss in Black population during the period 1960-70. (absolute numbers or rate of loss was not available). Three of the counties, Lowndes, Monroe and Jones, show a gain in the Black population of 0.1%-10.9%.

## CHAPTER III

## SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF FORT VALLEY STATE COLLEGE

Fort Valley State College is one of a national system of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities. There is at least one Land-Grant College or University in each State and Territory, this included the district of Columbia and Puerto Rico. In the southern states there are usually two Land-Grant schools one Black and one white they were established under the same bill, but at different times.<sup>14</sup>

The white Land-Grant schools were established under what is usually referred to as the First Morrill Act (Land Grant College Act of 1862). The original bill was sponsored by Justing s. Morrill of Vermont. The main requirement of the colleges placed under this act was for them to place a great emphaizes on "agriculture and mechanic arts".<sup>15</sup> "The Act offered each state 30,000 acres of public land for each member of Congress from the State, the land to be sold and proceeds invested as a permanent endowment for at least one college designated by the State Legislature".<sup>16</sup> After the passage of the Act, a problem arose in having enough revenue to support the designated colleges. In 1890 Senator Morrill then sponsored another bill which stated that there would be annual federal appropriations for the LandGrant schools. A provision was added to the Morrill Act that "gave to the States the option of either barring racial discrimination

in colleges receiving federal funds under the act, or of establishing separate colleges for Negro and white students and dividing the funds 'equitably' between them".<sup>17</sup> It is because of the added provision that the majority of the southern states have two Land Grant Schools. The Black Land-Grant College is usually referred to as the "1890" Colleges.

Fort Valley State College has been identified as the Black Land Grant College in Georgia and the University of Georgia at Athens is the white Land-Grant School. It is interesting how the two schools are set up. All of the money that is designated for Fort Valley State College flows through the University of Georgia. Whereas the University of Georgia has a direct line to the Georgia State Legislature, Fort Valley must go through University of Georgia in order to communicate with legislature. Even the money for the cooperative extension program, which is financed with federal funds is allocated through the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service to Fort Valley.<sup>18</sup> The head of the Fort Valley Extension Program is the assistant director of the University Cooperative Extension Service.

The Extension Program is the main connection between the school and the community. The goal of the Fort Valley Extension Program is "... to reach, primarily, limited resource individuals and families".<sup>19</sup> There are three programs involved the current Extension Service. The first is the Concerted Services in Training and Education Program (CSTE).

The purpose of the program is to serve as a "catalysts" for rural development. In order to do this, CSTE staff members will be attempting to organize a "multi-county chamber of commerce", which will cooperate in doing planning on a multi-county basis, rather than a city or town basis, as chamber of commerce usually do. The staff members also act in the role of "information brokers," meaning they supply information from federal department and from other agencies with which they work to people needing the information. There is supposed to be a citizen advisory council set up in conjunction with CSTE. The citizens council is made up of people from the county. It is responsible for setting up local priorities. After the priorities have been set forth, it is the job of the CSTE staff members to find the necessary resources to get the job done.

The second project under the Extension Service is the Impact Program. The concerns of this program is the efficient production and marketing of crops (primarily vegetables) by limited resource farmers in southwest Georgia, Thomas, Brooks, Mitchell, Lowndes and Miller Counties."<sup>20</sup> Marketing is done locally.

"The third extension program is called the Comprehensive Program because it is designed to deal with problems of both agriculture and humans."<sup>21</sup> The program operates in Webster, Marion, Schley, Talbott and Taylor Counties.

The staff of the Comprehensive Program will consist of two home economists, one a specialist in consumer education and the other a specialist in nutrition; a social welfare specialist, a youth development

specialist; and a community development specialist. Their purpose is to locate and educate low-income families in the area of family economics, housing, citizenship, purchasing and nutrition.<sup>22</sup> The staff is also to emphasize the family unit as a principle producer of agricultural products for their own use and to sell to other people. As stated elsewhere in this chapter, the Extension Program is the strongest existing link between the community and the school. However, there is another area wherein the school could be beneficial to the community of Black farmers and this is in reference to the school's research.

Since 1971-72 fiscal year, Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture has been getting increasing amounts of money for research from the federal government. 'Federal funds committed to the college for research under the 1890 college' provision amount to \$583,551 in 1971-72 and rose to \$718,475 in 1972-73."<sup>23</sup> The fiscal year of 1974-75 the college received over \$700,000.

The research component of the Division of Agriculture ranges from studying the asparagus to the studying of earthworms for additional source of problems for fish and poultry. If a feasibility study was done to determine what type of research would be advantageous to Black farmers in Georgia, it would add more relevance to the Division of Agriculture's research component.

The last area and may be the most important area where Fort Valley can assist the Black community has been alluded to many times in the paper, but not here to developed into, is the students of the Division

of Agriculture and their relationship to the Black community,  
especially as technical advisors.

## CHAPTER IV

## FORT VALLEY STATE COLLEGE DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE STUDENTS

As was previously mentioned, a questionnaire was devised and administered to the senior class at Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture. In this chapter the questions and the responds will be discussed. The total number in the senior class was fifteen and all fifteen responses were returned. All respondents are Black males.

Out of the fifteen students surveyed four are in Agronomy, seven in agriculture education, two in horticulture, one in botany, and one in electronics engineering. After identification by field, the questionnaire inquired as to the why's for majoring in agriculture.

In analyzing the question it was found that sixty per cent of the students chose the field of agriculture because of interest in the field. Twenty per cent were interested in the job opportunities that they felt would be available upon their graduation. The remaining percent had no specific reason for entering into the field.

Fifty-five per cent of the interviews had been involved in farming prior to coming to For Valley State.

Eighty-six per cent of the respondents are optimistic about the future of Black people in agricultural production and related industries.

Forty-six per cent of the interviews were undecided as to where they expected to find a job. Twenty-six per cent expected to go into the army, Twenty per cent expressed a desire to work in industry, such

as Gold Kist. The remaining stated they would prefer to teach at a high school. A question that was not asked, but was answered in over half of the interviews was related to whether or not the respondents wanted to remain in Georgia. Forty per cent felt a desire to remain in some section of Georgia. 0.6 per cent stated that they would prefer to be any where other than Georgia.

Twenty per cent of the respondents had no comments as to the relationship of their subject area to the future of Black people. Thirteen per cent felt there was no relationship at all. Of the sixty-six per cent that felt there was a relationship, only twenty per cent had a concrete idea of what that relationship involved.

Fifty-three per cent of the interviews felt that the rest of the Fort Valley State College student body felt that their major was in significant. Thirty-three per cent felt that the rest of the student body had respect for those students majoring in agriculture, the remainder had no comment.

Seventy-three per cent of the respondents had never had any contact with the Black farmers since coming to Fort-Valley State. Twenty-seven per cent had had some type of contact with a Black farmer.

Seventy-three of the interviews did not plan to buy and farm their own land, Twenty-seven per cent did plan to do so at some point in the future.

From the responds to the questionnaire it would appear that the majority of the students in Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture are optimistic students with an interest in the field of



agriculture. The majority of the students felt that there was a relationship between their field and the future of Black people, but they were unable to either conceptualize or articulate the relationship.

The response of the students would appear not to support the hypothesis of this study. Though the students seem to have some of the innate ingredients, i.e. optimism and interest, it does not appear that the school has developed the potential into a product that is needed by the Black Community.

## CHAPTER V

FORT VALLEY STUDENTS, PROFESSOR AND A BLACK  
PERSPECTIVE

In talking to faculty members at Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture, they seemed to be aware that Black farmers in Georgia and throughout the country are having problems, i.e. managing the farms, competing with corporate farmers and finding markets for their goods. However, they have not yet moved to the point where they can see that there is a very important role that the school, faculty and students might be able to play to assist in alleviating some of the problems.

At this time the school is not relating directly to the problems of the Black farmers at least from my visit at the school and in my conversations with students and faculty members there was no evidence of any direct relationship.

Many of the faculty members felt that they should be producing scientists that would be beneficial to all mankind. That is a beautiful idealistic goal, but the question that immediately comes to mind is who will be concentrating on the problems of Black people i.e. food production, while Black people are being universal. It needs repeating that if we as a people are to survive that we as a people have to unite and use all the available resources to guarantee that survival. Scientists are definitely needed by Black people, but practitioners are also needed. In viewing Fort Valley State's curriculum it appears that practical application of theories is being deemphasized. It might be beneficial to the students and to the Black farmers if the students were placed on the Black farmers land for a semester for a field practicum, somewhere around

the senior year. In this way the students would be able to put to use those theories and other classroom activities that have been learned. On the other hand the farmers would have the benefit of the students expertise.

There also has to be a reeducation of the faculty so that they may better understand the importance of agricultural technicians to Black people. Once they themselves have developed some type of Black perspective, they might better be able to transmit it to their students. As stated in the previous chapter Fort Valley State College Division of Agriculture has the raw material, i.e. the Black students who are ready to make the linkage between their field and the Black community if they just knew how. The school now has to find a way to help the students being about that linkage for the good of all Black people.

1. Sex of respondent; Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Why did you choose this field?
4. Were you involved in farming in anyway prior to coming to Ft. Valley State?
5. In your opinion what future is there for Black people in agricultural production and related industries?
6. Is there any particular role for Black women in these fields?
7. When you graduate where do you expect to find a job?
8. How, in your opinion, is your major subject area related to the future of Black people?
9. How, in your opinion, do other students at Ft. Valley State see agricultural majors?
10. Have you since coming to Ft. Valley State ever been contacted by Black farmers for assistance of an kind.
11. Do you have plans to buy and farm your own land when you finish school?

## FOOTNOTES

- (1) "Black Farmers In The Age of Agri-Business, Black Enterprise, August, 1973, pp. 18-20.
- (2) "Special Report", Newsweek, November 11, 1975 p. 58
- (3) "Special Report", Newsweek, November 11, 1975, p. 59
- (4) The Black Economic Research Center, Only Six Million Acres: Black Owned Land in the Rural South; The Black Economic Research Center, N. Y. June, 1973, p. 1
- (5) The Black Economic Research Center, A Comprehensive Effort in Black Economic Development, The Black Economic Research Center, N. Y., 1973
- (6) The Black Economic Research Center, Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black Owned Land in the Rural South; The Black Economic Research Center, N. Y. June, 1973. P. 3.
- (7) IBID, p.3. Griggs, Anthony. "How Black Lost 9,000,000 Acres of Land", Ebony, October, 1974, pp. 97-98
- (8) The Black Economic Research Center, Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black Owned Land in the Rural South, the Black Economic Research Center, p. 57
- (9) Griggs, Anthony, "How Blacks Lost 9,000,000 Acres of Land, Ebony, October, 1974, p. 104.
- (10) IBID, P. 104
- (11) IBID, p. 109
- (12) The Black Economic Research Center, Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black Owned Land in the Rural South, The Black Economic Research Center, pp.54-55.
- (13) Tucker Jack and Lee, Everett S., The Distribution of Southern Black Population, Southern Regional Council, Atlanta, Georgia, 1974.
- (14) Thackery, Russell I. "Senator Morrills Baby", American Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, August-September 1974, p. 22.
- (15) IBID, p. 22.
- (16) IBID, p. 23

- (17) Hinton, George K., "At Fort Valley State College - New Hopes, New Resources for Agriculture," Interfaith, The University System of Georgia Magazine, Summer-Fall 1973, p. 48
- (18) IBID, p. 50
- (19) IBID, p. 51
- (20) IBID, p. 49
- (21) IBID, p. 50
- (22) IBID, p. 51
- (23) IBID, p. 49

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